

Dear Commissioners:

I urge you to act to prevent further concentration of media into the hands of fewer and fewer entities. The insidious effect of media concentration is that it is not even noticed by the general public--the social and political agenda is set for them by an increasingly small number of media giants without the public even being aware of it.

There are many critics, as I'm sure you're aware, of the effects of media concentration on public discourse in this country--the argument generally goes that as media becomes concentrated into fewer and fewer hands, the range of opinions expressed in the media becomes narrower and narrower. I want to tell you briefly of an instance of how corporate media was able to exert editorial control over a local media that it didn't even produce.

As a producer of an independent local newspaper called "Cop Watch", I have had the experience of having my publication rejected by the print-shops of two corporate-owned small market newspapers--one of which I had worked with for a number of years before it was bought out by Media General. In the case of our newspaper (which provides a voice for low-income and other marginalized people on the issue of police brutality), the large media corporations were able to censor our newspaper.

Would we have been rejected by a smaller, independently-owned newspaper as well? Perhaps. While criticism of the police has never been a "popular" pursuit, it became even less popular after Sept. 11th, 2001 (though I would argue that the NEED for public debate of the issue has actually INCREASED, since the number of police killings of civilians has increased dramatically over the past year). So the political climate may have had something to do with it. Yet as I mentioned, one of the newspapers that refused to print our paper had taken jobs from me in the past, when they were independently owned, and presumably less concerned about associating themselves with a "controversial" publication such as ours. While I'm not arguing some sort of "conspiracy theory" of control of the media, the overall message seems to be that you've got freedom of the press only as long as you can afford to OWN the press.

I urge you to do everything that you can to cease the further concentration of media into huge monopolies.

Thank you,
Scott Trent
Greensboro, NC